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***PROLIFERATION, NATIONALISM
AND REGIONAL STABILITY:
AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY DILEMMA***

by

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Seminar 32, question #10 - Analyze the following statement: "In part because of the proliferation of high technology weaponry in the Third World, the maintenance of regional balances of power will be one of the most important problems confronting American policy-makers and strategists in the future." Is this statement valid?

Introduction

A stunning worldwide revolution in weapons technology has been occurring and will continue to occur over the next two decades. Dramatic improvements in weapons accuracy and destructive power, along with a veritable explosion in the availability of advanced weapons information will fundamentally change the scope and scale of modern warfare. In the hands of aggressive regional powers, modern weapons systems have a potentially destabilizing effect on regional balances of power¹ and threaten United States economic access to overseas markets.² While the proliferation of high-tech weapons systems is important, it is only one catalyst among several factors which may destabilize the new world balance of power.³ Rampant nationalistic fervor and shifting economic power centers may also disrupt the post-Cold War international system. The transformation of the Cold War bipolar geopolitical world into one characterized as multipolar, is occurring simultaneously with a rebirth of European and Asian ethnic nationalism—to include religious fundamentalism—with unpredictable results.⁴ Additionally, the international balance of power is becoming one in which economic power, instead of raw military might, is the true indicator of a first-rate power.⁵

During the Cold War, American national interests were driven by our goal of containment of Communism.⁶ Perhaps more so than in the past American domestic social and economic pressures, rather than international pressures, will drive U.S. foreign policy. In light of America's economic and social challenges, as well as our requirement for overseas markets and an unpredictable international milieu, it is vital that advanced weapons system proliferation be restricted.

¹ Joseph, p. 167-8; Karl, p. 93; Sagan, p. 70.

² Gerten, p. 68; Drucker, p. 161.

³ Huntington, "*The Clash of Civilizations*," p. 28, 39; Moynihan, p. 13.

⁴ Olmae, p. 90; Oxnam, p. 69; Huntington, "*The Erosion of American Interests*," p. 28-29.

⁵ Kennedy, p. 413; Copeland, p. 40.

⁶ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 16; Schlesinger, "*Quest for a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy*," pp. 18.

This essay will examine the powerful influence of modern weapons systems and ethnic nationalism on the post-Cold War multipolar world while stressing the importance of maintaining stable regional balances of power. For the foreseeable future, American economic surge as well as domestic social stability require U.S. access to economic sources of strength throughout the globe. A glimpse at the interlocking and fluid nature of the post-Cold War international system of states will highlight America's national interest in containing advanced weapons systems and ethnic nationalism.

The Nature of the Post-Cold War World

In the future, the forces of international integration—economic, technical, military and political—will create unprecedented opportunities for progress around the world. Yet, these forces can also fuel new threats to regional and national security.⁷

With the demise of the bipolar world has come a range of second-order effects: less cohesive alliances, arms control regimes that are more difficult to maintain, and weapons-related technologies that are more difficult to control. Some regional powers may move to assert their interests, often with destructive effects (e.g., Yugoslavia and Iraq).⁸ Hostile states such as North Korea, Iraq, and Iran will not want to provoke a conventional challenge to the U.S. but are more likely to develop asymmetric strategies to pursue regional ambitions.⁹ These will range from subversion of U.S. regional partners and the threatened use of WMD to attacks on American civil infrastructure and the adoption of unique and asymmetric forms of warfare or weapons, creating greater complexity in our national security challenges.¹⁰

The forces behind greater global integration and global interdependence—international trade and finance, information flows, and technology transfers—make nations less self-reliant, but some states will lose a degree of control over their domestic agendas.¹¹ In other cases, the erosion of state authority may occur at the same time that population growth, economic expansion, and urbanization increase demands on government infrastructures.¹² Furthermore, terrorists and organized crime groups will take advantage of advanced information technologies to undermine

⁷ Spector, p.62.

⁸ Olmae, p. 84.

⁹ Carus, p. 131; Mazarr, p. 101.

¹⁰ Spector, p. 77; Betts, pp. 28-30.

¹¹ Hormats, p. 106.

¹² Fry, et al, p. 147-58.

government efforts to stop them. At the same time the proliferation of weapons, as well as drug trafficking, uncontrolled refugee migrations, and environmental damage, threaten the stability within regional balances of power.¹³

Professor Paul Kennedy notes in his seminal work The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, that in order for a nation to hold its own against any other nation “to be a Great Power,” a flourishing economy must exist.¹⁴ Fortunately, over the last few years, America has ridden a crest of high economic achievement, weathering the economic shoals of a recession in Asia and Latin America. Despite this boon, Washington has continued to look to “reinvest” resources from Pentagon coffers into domestic programs since the demise of the Soviet Union. Now, with a limited war escalating in Kosovo and uncertainties in North Korea and Iraq, U.S. policy makers must confront a rapidly changing and potentially volatile world with severely limited American defense resources.¹⁵

While emphasizing military development at the expense of the civilian economic sector is not without benefit to the national interest, serious economic scholars point to a more wide-ranging impact on society from emphasizing investment in the latter sector.¹⁶ While addressing U.S. economic shortcomings and domestic social malaise will correctly assume an increasing percentage of our political leaders efforts, our nations’ dependence on healthy world economic markets means that America can no longer afford a self-indulgent return to isolationism.¹⁷ Likewise, in the aftermath of Iraq’s “invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent response by the United States and world community brought new emphasis to the concern for both political frameworks and military structures within which such regional challenges can be met.”¹⁸ This complex relationship between domestic and foreign policy will severely tax the flexibility and vision of American political leadership and decisiveness through the turn of the century.¹⁹

During the upcoming years, U.S. domestic conditions will compel American policy-makers to address the dual nature of the modern industrial world. This *New World Order* is characterized by the necessity of intense economic competition and the requirement for robust American

¹³ Sagan, p. 78.

¹⁴ Kennedy, p. 539.

¹⁵ Hyland, p.43

¹⁶ Kennedy, p.444-46; Drucker, p. 166.

¹⁷ Hyland, pp. 42, 46.

¹⁸ Fry, et al, p 198.

manufacturing growth.²⁰ In addition, the international arena is an occasionally dangerous environment, requiring increasingly expensive military forces, wherein over-emphasis on one aspect of economic development at the expense of the other can bring financial ruin or, in the event of war, a national military disaster. For the national strategist, there are no easy answers or general rules applicable for every exigency.²¹ A closer look at the ongoing revolution in weapons technology and rampant arms availability highlights the effect that weapons proliferation has in upsetting regional balances of power and endangering American economic security.

A Revolution in Weaponry

A worldwide industry in armaments enhances the availability of modern weapons.²² International trade in advanced weapons systems has been a historical source of national wealth and will provide a continuing source of political instability in the world. The transformation of the now-defunct Soviet Union into a new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) has not decreased the need for hard currency in any of the newly-autonomous states since the USSR's dissolution less than a decade ago.²³ The creation of new independent, national armies within the CIS will certainly make demands on the already existing armaments industry.

In addition to traditional conventional weapons proliferation, the ominous threat of weapons of mass destruction—chemical, biological and even nuclear weapons—will exist well into the next century as out-of-work former-Soviet atomic technicians and scientists sell their talents to the highest bidder. The introduction of nuclear weapons into formerly nuclear-free regions of the world may serve as an added destabilizing factor.²⁴

To the leaders of an emerging regional hegemony, conventional weapons of increased accuracy, range and destructive power may serve as an attractive alternative to environmentally hazardous nuclear weapons.²⁵ Potential capabilities to develop indigenous fuel-air explosives, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, as well as directed-energy armaments are present in many developing and industrialized nations.²⁶ The revolution in modern arms has narrowed the

¹⁹ Travers, pp. 113.

²⁰ Slaughter, p. 195.

²¹ Kennedy, pp. 539-540.

²² Karl, p. 102.

²³ Menon, p. 170;

²⁴ Bundy, p. 154; Hagerty, p. 85; Steinbruner, p. 87; Sagan, p. 68.

²⁵ Schlesinger, "*Nonproliferation and U.S. Foreign Policy*," p. 104.

²⁶ Steinbruner, p. 87; Carus, p. 129; Joseph, p. 169.

distinction between conventional and non-conventional weapons and the destructive power of these modern armament systems now approaches that of nuclear weapons.²⁷ Since availability of technological knowledge is increasingly widespread and critical militarily, scientific knowledge is difficult to restrict, the major industrial states no longer hold a monopoly on the latest weapons development programs.

The resultant diffusion of advanced weaponry has made modern lethal weapons available to smaller nations.²⁸ Additionally, the qualitative gap between the U.S. weapons systems and armaments available to many potential adversaries has, in some cases, been bridged and the deadliness of future regional battlefields may rival those formerly projected in the Central NATO front.²⁹ Expanding capabilities for production of nuclear, chemical and conventional advanced weapons are present in nations such as Argentina, Brazil, Israel, Iraq, Iran, China, Pakistan, and India.³⁰ Because of these emergent armaments industries, future warring nations will be more autarkic in their weapons procurement capabilities, or at least they will be less dependent upon the traditional arms supply outlets of the U.S. and Russia for obtaining advanced weapons systems.

During the post-World War II period, issues concerning the balance of power were aimed at frustrating Soviet ambitions. As a result of the Cold War, the threat of nuclear war and the spread of Communism, all American foreign policy issues were evaluated according to their impact on Soviet containment. Today, a hostile and fiercely competitive economic world environment is combined with widespread proliferation of advanced weapons systems. The United States' dependence on an intimate and interlocking global economy requires the frustration and deterrence of the ambitions of regional aggressors.³¹ Failure to contain the growth of local hegemonies (e.g., Iraq) will upset the local balance-of-power and restrict American economic growth.³² The upcoming revolution in conventional weapons technology and widespread weapons availability will place the maintenance of regional balances-of-power, as well as American access to vital overseas resources and markets, at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy.³³

²⁷ Sagan, p. 100.

²⁸ Trost, p. 94.

²⁹ Perkovich, p. 161;

³⁰ Perkovich, p. 154.

³¹ Kupchan, et al, p. 60.

³² Olmae, p. 92.

³³ Trost, p. 93.

Regional Balances of Power and the United States National Interest

The “long peace” which characterized the post-World War II balance of power was maintained in part by a rough equality of military power in a bipolar system—not to mention the threat of mutually assured destruction through nuclear annihilation.³⁴ The end of the Cold War has seriously taxed the victorious Western Alliance as NATO scrambles to devise a post-Cold War reason for existence.³⁵ Future international events remain uncertain after the sudden demise of the relatively stable US-USSR bipolar balance of power (which helped prevent devastating general war after 1945) may degenerate into a violent multipolar world.

Under a multipolar balance of power, the focus of political and military equality is on the strategic balance between the two leading states within the system, but the relative power of other actors are also important. The overall equality within the multipolar system is an aggregate of the relative equality among all of the poles. In fact, most large-scale wars in a multipolar balance of power break out when an ambitious leading hegemonic state takes on the other major powers.³⁶ The probability of such wars occurring increases when one leading state emerges from the pack and aspires to isolate and to defeat the other players.³⁷ A hypothetical world system where regional hegemonies vie for power using high-technology weapons systems is not out of the question. In a bipolar international system of equality, alliances tend to remain stable and are arrayed around a mutually acknowledged leader. Conversely, in a multipolar configuration alliances may be temporary with no recognized leaders.³⁸ While the world has grown accustomed to bipolar stability, a multipolar world is not inherently less stable.

A bipolar configuration of forces is defined as one in which the majority of political units are aligned around those two among the many actors whose strength exceeds that of the others. The goal of the major players within a bipolar state of equilibrium is to avoid finding themselves subject to the whims of a rival.³⁹ The historical experience of the Peloponnesian bipolar world would indicate the potential for internecine fighting to erupt exists within a bipolar system of international relations as well as a multipolar arrangement.⁴⁰ The record of the *Concert of Europe*,

³⁴ Mearsheimer, p. 21

³⁵ Gray, p. 38; Friedberg, pp. 10-11.

³⁶ Mearsheimer, p. 18.

³⁷ Mearsheimer, p. 18

³⁸ Aron, p. 138.

³⁹ Aron, p. 136.

⁴⁰ Moynihan, p. 134.

which maintained the peace in Europe from 1815 until the 1860s, indicates that peace is possible in a complex system of divergent political power.⁴¹

Power distribution trends in the current international system are moving to Western Europe and Japan and away from the US and Russia⁴² The addition of numerous new economic and military powers in the “*new world order*” may only add to the confusion and potential for political disequilibrium and violence. In addition to the proliferation of advanced weapons technology, an important destabilizing factor, which threatens worldwide regional balances-of-power, is the rise of ethnic nationalism and militant Islamic fundamentalism in Europe and Central Asia. The violent civil war among the ethnic camps of Yugoslavia demonstrates the grim potential for nationalistic hatred in disrupting world peace.⁴³ A look at the worldwide increase in national consciousness, chauvinism and religious fanaticism will highlight the need for a new international policy of weapons and hegemonic containment.

Nationalism and the Threat to Regional Balances

Rampant nationalism has served historically as a malevolent factor contributing to violent disruption within the international system.⁴⁴ The proliferation of technically advanced weapons systems combined with the removal of Cold War inhibitions will probably increase the scope and influence of national chauvinism on the world scene. The disintegration of the Soviet Union earlier this decade has left in its wake a constellation of European and Asian political entities who are filled with intolerance, ethnic self-righteousness and rejection of social compromise.⁴⁵ Rising nationalism within the CIS—be it Slavic, Muslim or some other—places the containment of ethnic chauvinism within the purview of United States national interest.⁴⁶

Dizzying demographic shifts within Islamic states may yet cause regional destabilization in the Middle East, as well as within Southwest and South Asia. For example, Iran will experience a

⁴¹ Palmer and Colton, pp. 397, 416-17. *During this time the balances were complex, requiring delicate and vigilant management to work. Prince Metternich was the right man at the right time to master this complex balance which kept Europe from war for over sixty years. After his death, less skilled diplomats tried and failed to maintain the equilibrium.*

⁴² Kennedy, p. 538.

⁴³ Moynihan, p. 23

⁴⁴ Mearsheimer, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Brzezinski, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Goldberg, p. 57; Moynihan, pp. 5, 12.

doubling of its population, rising to over 100 million people shortly after the turn of the century.⁴⁷ Additionally, the 50 million former Soviet Muslim populations produce as many children in one year as do 100 million Russians.⁴⁸ Militant Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria, Egypt, Iran and in the now autonomous Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union may serve as a focus for world political instability that can be exacerbated by the spread of potent weapons. As demonstrated in the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, nations whose expansionist tendencies have been previously inhibited by the fear of global war may no longer be restrained in carrying out aggrandizing ambitions. The demise of the bipolar Cold War international system has heralded a dangerous new era of complex regional instability in which local balances of power are tipped beyond equilibrium.⁴⁹

A number of volatile regional confrontations, such as Korea, the Middle East, and South Asia have smoldered without long-term resolution and with dangerously escalating arms race.⁵⁰ In the post-Cold War world the ultimate distribution of world power and nuclear weapons is by no means certain as evidenced by our newest members of the "Atomic Club" Pakistan and India.⁵¹ The balance of political and economic power continues to be a perplexing uncertainty.

National self-assertion and frustrations, once inhibited by central authority in Moscow, may now be unleashed and equipped with the latest in high-tech weapons systems. Additionally, terrorists, drug cartels and nationalist extremists in Latin America and Southeast Asia may compete to obtain arms previously earmarked for Europe.⁵² The availability of modern weapons in the hands of these organizations may dangerously shift the balance of power away from legitimate governments in favor of these asymmetric elements. All present important problems confronting American policy-makers and strategists in the future as they work to maintain current regional balances of power.

⁴⁷ Carus, p. 131.

⁴⁸ Brzezinski, p. 13.

⁴⁹ Schlesinger, "*Quest for a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy*," pp. 25-26

⁵⁰ Blodgett, p. 210.

⁵¹ Mearshemier, p. 31.

⁵² Blodgett, p. 210.

Domestic Concerns, U.S. Policy, and Regional Affairs

Domestic considerations will continue to drive the foreign policy of other nations and the U.S. is certainly affected by politics and social difficulties at home. America over the next few decades will become increasingly responsive in her foreign policy to the concerns of her citizens.⁵³ For better or worse, Americans have always been reluctant to commit their military to maintain a balance of power. In World War I there was a very strong anti-war sentiment that was only overcome by very emotional appeals to stop the ruthless Huns who invaded France and raped Belgium. Americans were also encouraged to fight "a war to end all wars." In World War II, the American public remained ambivalent in the late 1930s. Consequently the U.S. Congress was strongly in favor of remaining neutral, despite the fact that Nazi Germany was on the verge of conquering Europe and devising the Jewish Holocaust, while Japan was engaged in conquest all across the Pacific rim. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was very concerned about the situation and wanted to come into the war, but could only provide clandestine support for England in the face of American isolationism. It took Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and Germany's declaration of war on the United States to give Americans the cause they needed to rally behind.⁵⁴

More recently, we have seen the American public give support for the war in Korea, where the issue was an invasion of one country by another. There was very poor support for the war in Vietnam, which was a situation where maintaining a regional balance of power seemed to be the primary issue.⁵⁵ Americans gave full support for the 1990 Gulf War, where there was an unprovoked invasion of one country by another and Saddam Hussein was seen to be a dangerous aggressor who had always used his nation's resources for aggressive military purposes. Currently, public support remains mixed concerning support of NATO forces initiating attacks on the Former Republic of Yugoslavia for its internal actions concerning its province of Kosovo.

Carl von Clausewitz provides some relevant comments on this topic.

*...The moral elements are among the most important in war. They constitute the spirit that permeates war as a whole, and at an early stage they establish a close affinity with the will that moves and leads the whole mass of force...*⁵⁶

⁵³ Travers, p. 113.

⁵⁴ Blakemore, *Strategy and Policy Seminar Discussions*, 1998-99.

⁵⁵ Karnow, p. 546 ; Summers, p. 67; Sheehan, pp. 717-718.

⁵⁶ Clausewitz, p. 184.

This quote from a cold, calculating Prussian has even greater significance when applied to the United States, where the people have a say in the foreign policy of their country and feel that their nation has a moral mission to support and spread the ideals of democracy and freedom. During the Cold War there were many "...unpalatable compromises and alliances the United States was forced to make or choose to accept in the name of anti-communism."⁵⁷ Over the past fifty years, Americans accepted *realpolitik* in foreign affairs as a necessary evil to preserve our way of life. However, with the fracturing of the bipolar world dynamic, it may no longer be necessary to subordinate

The American public will support balance of power politics only when it serves a higher purpose. However, the U.S. may be less able to maintain regional balances of power because of economic and other domestic problems, the name of the game in global power is now economics.⁵⁸ Military strength has always been dependent on economic strength, but now economics seem to be the dominant force in the world apart from its affect on the military or politics.⁵⁹ The aforementioned notwithstanding, there remains a need for political and military involvement in the Third World until it becomes obvious to Third world leaders that the power of the day is economic rather than military. It is also likely that our involvement in these regional situations will be morally justifiable and supported by the American public. Today, "the interests of geopolitics and human rights may actually come to coincide in American policy more than at any time in the past."⁶⁰ The economic capability of the U.S. to maintain peace is somewhat ameliorated by the assistance of our allies. Increasingly we will need common understanding, common objectives, shared costs and joint action among the allies to keep world peace. This will lead to a far more stable world than unilateral action by the U.S. or the bipolar reaction of the Cold War days.⁶¹

For American foreign policy makers the implications are clear. In the *new world order*, economic security is also a vital consideration.⁶² Transformations in the post-Cold War balance of power are occurring rapidly, not only in terms of sheer military power, but in capacity for industrial

⁵⁷ Hyland, p. 44.

⁵⁸ Drucker, p. 167; Gerten, p. 70.

⁵⁹ Hyland, p. 46.

⁶⁰ Hyland, p. 45.

⁶¹ Fry, et al, p. 130.

⁶² Inman and Burton, p. 116.

production as well.⁶³ Over the past four decades the nature, as well as the process, of U.S. political decision making has changed. Developing a unified vision or consensus for foreign policy is much more difficult than it once was in the recent past.⁶⁴ In this era of defense budget austerity and military personnel reduction America cannot expect to enjoy the political will or the resources to act as the world's policeman.⁶⁵

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the validity of the statement that, in part because of the proliferation of high technology weaponry in the Third World, the maintenance of regional balances of power will *indeed* be one of the most important problems confronting American policy-makers and strategists in the future. In the modern world, attaining the commendable goal of future American economic competitiveness as well as political and societal security require new strategic thinking. Almost a decade after the collapse of Soviet communism, Russia continues to struggle with an uncertain economic and military balance of power.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, as the U.S. continues to bask in the glow of its Cold War victory as the world's sole superpower, a host of international players' scramble for power with potentially negative impacts on U.S. national security interests. America must work diplomatically in conjunction with the world's industrial democracies as well as with nations in the developing world to restrict the spread of WMD and other high technology weapons, as well as inhibiting regional hegemony.

The *ends* of American diplomacy and military strategy is to maintain the peace and guarantee U.S. access to overseas markets and resources. The future *means* of carrying out U.S. foreign policy will rest on restricting the proliferation of high-tech weapons systems, inhibiting ambitiously aggressive nations, promoting the proliferation of democratic-based states, and maintaining regional balances of power.⁶⁷ The answer to conducting a rational American national security policy may be found in an already existing collective security apparatus. As current operations by an U.S.-lead NATO ably demonstrate, international security organizations such as these provide the existing framework from which the U.S. can carry out its vital national objectives.

⁶³ Kennedy, p. 538.

⁶⁴ Friedberg, pp. 13-15.

⁶⁵ Hyland, p. 43.

⁶⁶ Menon, 151.

⁶⁷ Hormats, p. 105; Schlesinger, "Nonproliferation and U.S. Nuclear Policy," pp. 103-104.

The advent of the post-Cold War international system has allowed the UN to employ all of its authority to maintain world peace and international security.⁶⁸ In order to prevent the proliferation of advanced weapons technologies and components to potential regional aggressors, the U.S. should continue to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Missile Technology Control Regime to inhibit the continued spread of advanced weaponry.⁶⁹ Increased American support for—and reliance on—international political organizations, rather than unilateral actions to stabilize regional conflicts, can de-politicize our peace efforts and demonstrate a sincere American desire to avoid war. The U.S. can cast an introspective look at her own international weapon sales policies with the goal of limiting arms proliferation. Additionally, as one of the worlds leading exporters of advanced weaponry, the U.S. can sharply reduce its own weapons deliveries abroad just as it has done in Pakistan.

While the old rules of Cold War containment policy melt away from us, the present era of international political upheaval and economic uncertainty carries a sobering potential for political violence. These complex and on-going events, along with American dependence on overseas markets and resources, will increase the importance to U.S. national interest, in curbing worldwide weapons sales and in maintaining stable regional balances of power. Future foreign policy requires goals and a vision to replace the containment policy of the Cold War. Maintaining regional balances of power does not, by itself, constitute an adequate goal nor does it provide a vision. Change is continual in world history. All great powers will inevitably fall from their pinnacle at some point.⁷⁰ If the United States were to some day fall from its dominant position in the world, it would be much to its advantage if it were to happen in a world where freedom and democracy are predominant values and the world community does not tolerate aggression.

⁶⁸ Blodgett, p. 207.

⁶⁹ Joseph, p. 173.

⁷⁰ Kennedy, p. 190.

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